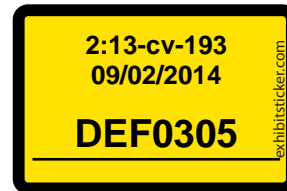


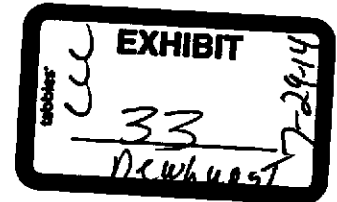
Dewhurst backs voter ID bill, moving primary

CLAY ROBISON, Copyright 2007 Houston Chronicle Austin Bureau
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AUSTIN — Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst said Tuesday that he will try to win Senate approval of a controversial, partisan-charged bill to require Texans to show photo identification before being allowed to vote.

He also said there is "growing interest" in changing the date for next year's presidential primary from March to February but moving the date back to March for state elections in 2010, when he is expected to run for governor.



And he backs legislation to limit automatic college admissions under the state's top 10 percent law.

In an interview, Dewhurst said he believed the "huge majority" of Texans supported the voter ID legislation, which won final House approval on Tuesday over the opposition of Democratic lawmakers.

"Why isn't it necessary to prove that you're a U.S. citizen to vote in U.S. elections?" he asked.

Similar legislation, which Democrats contend is designed to discourage minorities from voting, died in the Senate two years ago. And all 11 Democratic senators earlier this session vowed to block the bill again by voting against a procedural motion necessary to advance the measure.

Dewhurst, a Republican, said he will try to pass the bill anyway but declined to say how.

If all senators are present, the 11 Democrats form the minimum number necessary to keep the bill from receiving the required two-thirds vote. But one Democrat, Sen. Mario Gallegos of Houston, has missed most of the session, recuperating from a liver transplant, and has told Dewhurst that his doctor still advises against him being in Austin full-time.

Moreover, the voter ID bill could be advanced by being attached as an amendment to another election-related bill.

During his four-plus years as lieutenant governor, Dewhurst said he has "gotten dozens of letters from either Republicans or Democrats" threatening to block one piece of legislation or another.

Most of the time, he said, the threats never were carried out.

"We've always been able to work something out," he said.

The voter ID bill, which Republican sponsors say is important to guard against voter fraud, is strongly supported by conservative voters who dominate Republican primaries. Dewhurst is eyeing a race for governor in the 2010 GOP primary.

He said he opposes racial profiling and has long urged Congress to enact a guest worker program

for immigrants.

A bill to move the primary from the first Tuesday in March to the first Tuesday in February already has been approved by the House. Supporters hope the measure will win Texas more influence in next year's presidential nominating process.

Unlike the voter ID bill, it has generated little controversy.

"I think there is a growing interest to look at moving the primary up (to February) for 2008 as a little test pilot program and then moving it back to where it normally is for the 2010 election," Dewhurst said.

The House bill would make the change permanent.

Legislation to scale back the automatic college admissions law, which guarantees students who graduate in the top 10 percent of their high school classes admission to the state university of their choice, faces an uncertain future in the Senate because of the two-thirds procedural requirement.

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